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Text:

UNCLAS SENSITIVE MUSCAT 01117

SIPDIS
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ACTION: POLE
INFO: DAO PAO DCM OMC POLM AMB

DISSEMINATION: POLE
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:GGRAPPO
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PP RUEHC RUEHEE
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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6906
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS MUSCAT 001117

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR TASK FORCE 1, NEA/ARP, NEA/RA, NEA/PPD

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KMDR](#) [KWBG](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: TFLE 01: OMAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF CRISIS

SUMMARY

1. (U) After providing initial widespread front-page coverage on the crisis and publishing critical editorials of U.S. support of Israel and its veto of an Arab-League sponsored resolution in the Security Council, several media sources have tempered their headlines by highlighting "good news" stories. Critical editorials and graphic pictures remain, however, as does negative public sentiment posted on the Sablah Internet forum. End Summary.

"ISRAELI AGGRESSION" TOPS HEADLINES

2. (U) Each of Oman's three main Arabic/English daily publications, in both coverage and editorials, has framed the crisis as a result of "Israeli aggression." The Arabic daily "Oman," and its sister publication "Oman Daily Observer," offered the most balanced reporting of the three, though its July 14 editorial proclaimed Hezbollah's response to Israel's airstrikes as "legitimate resistance." English dailies, in exercising a lesser degree of self-censorship, have tended to publish more graphic photos of civilian casualties than their Arabic counterparts.

TEMPERING THE MIX

3. (U) Two of Oman's three main daily publishing houses have

since tempered their front-page headlines with "good news" stories. The "Times of Oman," for example, ran as its July 15 headline comments made by the National Economy Minister that Oman's GDP grew 24% in 2005. The paper also ran a complementary piece on employment gains. The "Observer" also ran a July 15 headline on Oman's traditional irrigation systems being added to the UN's World Heritage list.

CRITICAL OF U.S. POLICY

¶4. (U) Popular Arabic daily "al-Watan," and its sister English daily "Oman Tribune," however, have continued to highlight Israeli actions throughout the past three days and were the most critical of U.S. foreign policy. Citing the U.S. veto of the July 13 Qatari-sponsored Security Council resolution, the "Tribune" declared in a July 15 editorial, "The Israelis now have a license to kill." The paper, complete with a front-page inset of Ambassador Bolton vetoing the UNSC resolution against a photograph of Beirut, claimed that the U.S. action sent a clear message to Israel to "continue the offensive without any restraint against the Palestinians, kill their men, women, and children and destroy all facilities that will be of use to them."

¶5. (U) The "Times of Oman," with its sister Arabic publication "al-Shabiba," also stepped up criticism of U.S. policy. The paper's July 16 front-page featured a graphic picture of a severely injured child, as well as an editorial by the publisher, who criticized U.S. support for Israel. He commented, "In a clear show of positive support to Israel, the U.S. has been pumping funds and arms into Israel so it can pulverize the Arabs at will."

¶6. (U) Internet chat site Sablah continues to buzz with viewpoints critical of U.S. policy. In response to the posted question, "Does Hezbollah have the right to wage war?" 84% of the respondents replied yes, with only 16% responding no. On the question of whether the Omani government should condemn Israeli aggression, 30 respondents urged the government to make a formal statement condemning Israel. Others further voiced concern that U.S. support of Israel does not facilitate peace in the region.

¶7. (SBU) No peaceful demonstrations have been called for, however, as potential participants are fearful of possible police detention and interrogation.
GRAPPO